



Catholic **Faith, Life & Creed**

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

FAITH



Rembrandt, 1635; Sacrifice of Abraham (Genesis 22:10-12)



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.



Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the **Breaking Open the Word** worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana
Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

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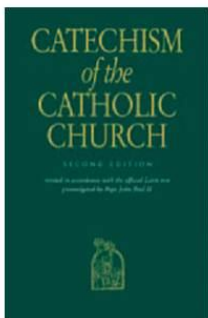


Sharing Human Experience

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in dyads, then share insights in the wider group.

- ▶ If someone were to ask you if you had “faith,” how would you answer him or her?
- ▶ Describe your faith to one other person.
- ▶ Faith is a living entity. It can grow, it can remain stagnate, or it can be lost. In what way, if any, have you experienced the growth of your own faith? Is there any evidence of that growth in your life?

Guest witness: Invite a parishioner to come and share an experience of deep faith, or an event in which their faith was strengthened, or a struggle with faith in which there was resolution, or other similar story.



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 150, 222-227, 588, 456-457, 776, 780, 851, 1040, 1129, and 1257.

Catechist introduces the topic of faith with these opening thoughts:

- ▶ The Church teaches that faith is our personal adherence to God; we are intimately connected to God; we enter into personal relationship with God (CCC: 150).
- ▶ The Church also teaches that through faith, people give *free assent* to the truth that God has revealed to human beings. What does that mean? It means that through faith we freely believe and agree that God has revealed himself to the human race. In other words, no one has coerced us into believing this. If so, it would not be faith. This kind of faith is far different than the kind of faith we place in a human person.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups.

- ▶ Have you ever put your faith in another person?
- ▶ What was it about that person that made you confident that you could put your faith in that person?

- ▶ When you put your faith in that person, what did that mean to you?
- ▶ What was your relationship with that person like once you decided to put your faith in that person?
- ▶ What did your experience teach you about the nature of faith?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ When we put faith in another person, we trust him or her to be a person of integrity. We trust that he or she cares about our best interests. We believe that he or she will do nothing to harm us. We trust that this person will always do the right thing. Those are all wonderful things and tremendous human qualities.
- ▶ However, human beings are sinners. They do not always live as they should. Putting all our faith in another person is not a good thing. The Church reminds us that when we put such faith in a mere creature it is futile and false (CCC, 150). However, putting all our faith in God, abandoning our lives to God's complete care and resting in God's loving embrace, is the most righteous and worthy act in which a human being can engage.
- ▶ We are to have faith in God alone.
- ▶ The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that having faith presupposes that we understand and embrace the dignity and unity of all people. It means that we are good stewards of all created things. It means that we trust God even in the face of suffering, trials, and tribulation (CCC, 222-227).
- ▶ Having faith means that we:
 - Know God's incredible greatness and majesty.
 - Are grateful to God.
 - Have a sense of urgency to give God thanks and praise.
 - Are conscious that we are made in God's image, that all people are created with divine life, and thus all men and women are created equal with true human dignity.
 - Trust God in the face of adversity.
 - Are stewards of God's creation and the resources of the earth.

The catechist puts the previous list (Having faith means that we:) on poster paper for all to see or give them the list. Allow participants to quietly reflect on the list and the following questions. Share their reflections with one other person then share insights with the wider group.

- ▶ If this is what faith in God means, have you ever experienced faith in such a way?
- ▶ Have you ever known God's incredible greatness and majesty?
- ▶ Have you ever been grateful to God?
- ▶ Have you ever had a sense of your need to thank God?
- ▶ Have you ever been consciously aware that we are made in God's image, that all people share a spark of God's divine life, and thus, all men and women share a true dignity?
- ▶ Have you ever had an experience of God in which you trusted him in the midst of a difficult life situation?
- ▶ Have you ever given thought to the principle that faith means that you are a

good steward of God's creation and resources?

Catechist continues:

Faith in God means faith in Jesus Christ for Christians.

- ▶ Christians cannot separate faith in God from faith in Jesus, the Son of God who was sent to save the world.
- ▶ For the Christian, having faith in God means having faith in Jesus. Jesus is God. God revealed Jesus to be his only begotten Son who suffered, died, and rose again from the dead for the sins of the world.
- ▶ Faith in Jesus means that the Holy Spirit is operative in our lives since it is the Holy Spirit who reveals Jesus to us. We are capable of calling Jesus Lord only because the Holy Spirit gifted us with the faith to believe it.

Catechist invites participants to share with one other person.

- ▶ It is very common for Christians to sometimes have doubts about God and about Jesus.
- ▶ Have you had any such doubts? Are you having doubts now?
- ▶ How would you rate your faith on a scale of one to ten? (This is just for the sake of this discussion; God would never ask us to rate the faith we have.)
- ▶ How do you feel about the faith you have?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ We are all called to share our faith in Christ with others. We are baptized into the royal, priestly, and prophetic ministry of Christ. We are baptized as priest to serve God's people, as prophet to share the good news of Christ with others, and as king to lead people to Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Many of us will be called upon to answer the question, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ?" Perhaps an honest response to that question comes right out of the Gospel of Mark in the Bible: "Yes, I believe; Lord, help my unbelief."
- ▶ Jesus had been on the mountain when a man brought his sick child for healing. The man asked the disciples who did not go with Jesus up the mountain if they would help his son. Word had gone out that Jesus' disciples were doing marvelous things too. However, this time they failed. The scribes were rubbing it in their noses. Jesus arrived on the scene, and the arguing stopped. The father of the boy ran to Jesus and told him that Jesus' disciples were not able to heal his son. Jesus chastised the disciples for their lack of faith. He told the father to bring the child. He asked how long the child had been sick. The father told him since childhood and then asked Jesus to help him if he could. Jesus responded, "If I can? All things are possible to those who believe." The man cried out, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" The boy was healed.
- ▶ We are called to share our incredible, God-given gift of faith in Jesus but then acknowledge that it is a gift that needs constant nurturing.
- ▶ Doubts will always be with us, but through the witness of our faith, and by praying to God for more of it, our faith grows.

Saved by faith and works

- ▶ Our Church teaches that we are saved through faith and works. We are saved by God's initiative, a free unmerited gift of God. What that means is that through the awesome self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross human beings are saved and are given access to eternal life with God.
 - Because of so great a gift, we can do no less than respond in faith and live our lives accordingly; in other words, *do good works!*
- ▶ When Catholics say they are saved by faith and works, it sounds to some other church traditions that we believe that have to earn our salvation by faith and by the good works we perform. That is not what Catholics believe.

This used to be an issue that divided Lutherans and Catholics. After much common dialogue, both parties resolved their differences and affirmed that both were saying the same thing; each Church simply nuanced it differently. Faith is a free gift from God, for so great a gift we can do no less than respond in faith by doing good works. We do not earn salvation; we cannot earn salvation. "Works" is our huge "thank you" to God for the great gift of faith.

- ▶ A vignette: A young teenager was bombarded by a peer who gave her a bumper sticker that read: "Don't be caught dead without Jesus." This peer then began to preach to her about "saving faith." She was suddenly terrified. How do I know if I have saving faith? How much faith is that? What is the "minimum daily requirement"? How much faith is needed?
- ▶ If salvation is based on faith, it is no wonder that Christians worry about having enough of it.
- ▶ The Scriptures give us a hint as to how much faith is needed, faith the size of a mustard seed, faith like the father of the sick son. The honest outpouring of the sick child's father's weak faith is consoling for us. It is the voice of all of us who at some time or another are plagued with doubt (even saintly Mother Theresa) so that all we can say is "*I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief!*" And then we act as if we do believe! The really good news is that Jesus did not chastise, rebuke, or reject the father for not having enough faith.
 - The Lord does not withhold grace from us depending on how much faith we do or do not have. God does not rate our faith; he gifts us with it. We must pray that the gift of faith is strengthened in us and then act as if it is!
- ▶ A vignette. There was once a good woman who was known in her village for having great faith. She was known for her calm and peace in the midst of much suffering and many trials. Another woman who lived quite a distance from this woman traveled to the village to ask the secret of this good woman's holy life. Running to the faith-filled woman, the second woman asked her, "Are you the

woman of great faith?” The faith-filled woman replied, “No, I am not the woman of great faith; I am the woman with a little faith in a great God.”

- ▶ The entire 2,000 year history of the Church is the story of weak faith clinging to a mighty God. Our faith is as weak or as strong as many of the saints who went before us. We need only look to Mother Theresa and her concern over the doubts she possessed. The Church was not founded by the faith of saints. God founded the Church and gifted it with grace, the gift of faith.
- ▶ It is God who takes the initiative toward human beings. A God who wants to be in intimate relationship with those he created. Human beings can do nothing to save themselves.
- ▶ Jesus’ own disciples constantly struggled with faith. Can we do no less?
- ▶ Faith often coincides with doubt; patience often goes hand in hand with impatience. We pray for patience because we seem to be lacking in it in the first place. We can be kind and we can be lacking in kindness. The flip side of humility is pride and arrogance. Faith does have a flip side; it is called doubt. Very often, they both take up residence side by side in the same human heart.
- ▶ We sometimes worry more about our lack of faith, than we give thanks to God for the faith we have.
- ▶ When was the last time you thanked God for the faith you have?

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in dyads or groups of four, then share insights with wider group. Catechist shares a story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ In order to make sure everyone understands the Church’s teaching on faith and works, (because more than likely that is an issue Catholics are often called upon to defend), discuss in small groups your understanding of the Catholic teaching on faith and works.
- ▶ In what way have you (or perhaps could you) similarly respond to the faith you have been given by engaging in good works? What does it concretely mean in your life?

A great hero of faith

- ▶ Abraham is our great hero of faith in the Bible. God told the aged, child-less Abraham that he would have a child and that his descendants would be many. In spite of Sarah’s old age, he trusted God. God was faithful to his word. All generations have called Abraham their father in faith. Even today all the major religions of the world revere the faith of Abraham.
- ▶ God tested Abraham and told him to sacrifice the son that God gave him, the son that would ensure his descendants would be many. Abraham set out to do what God asked. God prevented him from following through on the Lord’s command and had him instead offer a ram in Isaac’s place.
- ▶ Abraham simply trusted and obeyed the word of the Lord, he understood that God was the Master of the Universe and he owed his life and allegiance to him.
- ▶ We are called to do the same.

Catechist tells a story of faith. See appendix #4. Catechist then continues:

Characteristics of faith

No discussion of faith would be complete without naming some of the very formal things that our Church teaches about the mystery of faith. What are some of the characteristics of faith?

- ▶ Faith is grace.
 - Grace is the gift of God's self to human beings.
 - Faith is a gift of God. It is a supernatural virtue (CCC: 153).
 - The Holy Spirit actively brings people to faith in God.
- ▶ Faith is a human act
 - The act of believing is a human action. God gifts us with faith, but the human will and intellect must agree to accept faith by cooperating with God's grace.
 - God takes the initiative; human beings cooperate with God's initiative. Humans can do nothing to merit the grace God extends. It is pure gift.
- ▶ Faith and understanding
 - Human reason can believe the truth about who God is and how God acts on God's own authority. There is credible evidence of God's Revelation to human beings.
 - What is that evidence? Miracles of Jesus' and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth, stability, holiness, and effectiveness/fruitfulness—all these things are credible signs that human reason can look to as a sign of God's revelation to human beings.
 - Refer to the story on page 49-50 of *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. It is a story of a person whose intellect led him to the Catholic Church.
- ▶ Faith is certain. We can count on faith because it is based on God's Word and God's Word is true. Truth about God can seem elusive to human beings. God reveals himself to us and what he reveals is so much more than we could ever think on our own.
- ▶ Faith seeks understanding. God creates a hunger in the human heart. When faith is awakened in a person, that hunger is intensified, and the person begins the lifelong process of discovering more about God. Faith drives us to learn more about God's revelation to us about his plan of salvation for us. The Holy Spirit continually strengthens our faith so that we in turn continually seek to learn more about God. St. Augustine said: "I believe in order to understand; I understand to better believe."

Catechist shares the story in Appendix #2 or a similar story of faith. Catechist then continues:

- ▶ Faith and science: God created human beings with a mind (reason). God also has gifted humans with faith. God can never contradict the truth. Thus, methodological research in all branches of knowledge (if carried out in a scientific manner and if moral laws are not broken), can never conflict with the faith; things of faith and things of the world come from the same God. A humble and persevering scientist is led by the hand of God in spite of himself for it is God who

made them the scientist (CCC 159).

- For example, “Christian faith does not require the acceptance of any particular theory of evolution, nor does it forbid it, provided the particular theory is not strictly materialistic and does not deny what is essential to the spiritual essence of the human person, namely that God created each human soul directly to share immortal life with him.” (See *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 58-61 for further insight into this.)
- ▶ Freedom of faith: By its very nature, faith is freely accepted, never coerced. If that is not the case, it is not faith. Jesus invited; he did not coerce, cajole, or manipulate. The kingdom of God grows through love and witness, both formal and that of a well-lived Christian life, not by coercion.
- ▶ Perseverance in faith: Faith is a free, gratuitous gift from God, but it can be lost. Diligence is required to nurture and safeguard so great a gift. Faith can easily become stagnant unless we feed it. Faith is fed by commitment to God’s holy word, by prayer, especially prayer that God increase our faith, and by our acts of love, charity, and justice.
- ▶ Faith—the beginning of eternal life: Faith gives us a foretaste of heaven. We walk by faith, not by sight. We do not, in this world, see God face to face. We see him rather dimly. The Scripture uses the image of a clouded mirror. We will not see God completely until we stand before him in heaven. Suffering, injustice, and death seem to contradict the good news. It can shake our faith. We must look to those who have gone before us as witnesses of faith, to Abraham, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and those who have suffered and witnessed for their faith in God. Those who have chosen to believe in spite of great odds.
- ▶ Faith is a gift, but it is also a decision. Once the gift is given, we must decide to cooperate with that grace in order for it to grow.



Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to relate what was shared today to an experience in their lives. Catechist shares an experience from his or her life and invites others to do the same. See appendix #3.

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity taking place and makes arrangements for group participation.

The implications of faith are that we cooperate with God's saving work. We respond through faith and action. What is taking place in the parish this week that challenges you to take action?

For example, "This week our parish is supporting the new shelter for homeless women and children. Our parish is providing the financial and humanitarian help. The center needs help with renovations but also with clients who need the help of people with skill and expertise in working with such situations. Let us meet at the shelter this Monday evening."



Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following challenge by sharing with one other person.

- ▶ In what way does this teaching on faith challenge you and the Christian community? What are the implications?
- ▶ If faith requires we cooperate with God's saving grace, where in your life are you not cooperating with God's grace? What needs to take place for that to change?
- ▶ From what behaviors, attitudes, or actions does your faith ask you to be delivered?
- ▶ What are you willing to commit to do in response to your reflection on the word and Church teaching regarding faith?
- ▶ The Church teaches that prayer for faith and reading Scripture helps strengthen faith. What are you willing to commit to do this week in response to what we have shared today?

Catechist invites each person to commit to a specific Spiritual and Corporal Work of Mercy in response to God's call.

Journal

In what way does faith need to grow in my life? What is my greatest need for faith at this time in my life? In what way am I presently cooperating (or not) with God's grace—the grace of a living faith?



Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology (“Glory be to the Father...”), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

Option 2: Intercessions, Doxology, Opening Prayer B: #14, Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, Sacramentary. “For the Spread of the Gospel”

Appendix

#1. I often tell about the struggle of living with a mentally ill child. I am powerless over his illness. I have faith that God will help us navigate the very difficult waters of this disease. My response to the faith I have been given is to be an advocate for families who are just learning about the illness of their child. There was no one to help us through the early difficult days. I have been called upon to minister to families who receive this very bad news. I have been called upon to share what I have learned about the disease so that I can, in some ways, make their journey through the illness a little less horrific than it was for us. Life is very busy and there are times I think it would be easier to ignore such pleas for help, but my faith will not allow it. I can do no less than help others who similarly suffer. God has blessed and gifted us. God has been with us in the midst of hell. I must respond in faith to those who similarly suffer.

#2. A woman came from Communist Russia. Her father was a card-carrying communist. Her father would not allow the name of God to be mentioned in their home. Anything she knew about God came from the stories the grandmothers shared with the children in secret. When the missionaries came to Russia, after the fall of communism, they introduced Elaina to the living Christ. She fell in love with him. When she came to our parish in the United States to become fully initiated in the Catholic Church, all she could say was, "Tell me everything. I want to know everything there is about this great and glorious God! I want to know all the stories!" A hunger to know more about God was created by the initial faith in Jesus she experienced.

#3. For some time, I was struggling with issues of faith. Faith had been sorely tested at our home for the past year or two. I started to question God. I needed a sign. God said, "Blessed are those who do not need signs," but sad to say, I had come to a point in my life where I asked for a sign of God's presence in my life. Gracious as God is, he responded in triplicate.

My son-in-law was in Afghanistan. He was there for 15 months. We were very anxious for him to come home. Yet he could not tell us when that would be for security reasons. Before he was sent to Afghanistan, I gave him a very special sacramental, a family heirloom, a relic of Saint Maria Goretti. A relic is an object that contains a remembrance and commemoration of a certain saint that perhaps included material that was touched to the saint's body or perhaps a bone chip from the saint. Such a relic is a reminder of the great deeds and intercession of the saint whose relic it is. Maria Goretti was a young woman who stood up in the face of violent rape and gave her life in the process. She stood up for her faith in the face of violence.

I sent this relic with my son-in-law and told him we would all be praying for Maria Goretti's intercession so that he would be strong and remain safe in the face of violence.

We knew the time was fast approaching for his return home. My daughter called and told us the amazing news. We were in awe over God's intervention. This was for us a

true miracle, an arrangement of events by God to show us how much he loved us, to teach us that we must abandon our lives to God's care and a reminder that we are to trust God in all things, even when it all seems lost.

My son-in-law could not tell us the day or the hour of his return, but he did give us a clue. He told us that he would be returning home nine days from our son Joe's birthday. We quickly checked the Catholic calendar on the wall, and much to our amazement nine days from my son's birthday was the feast of Saint Maria Goretti. No words are adequate to express our amazement!

When I am tempted to doubt, I think of that event and all is well again. There is a reason that God places such importance on the action of remembering. Such is the purpose of the Scriptures. We remember the great deeds of the Lord, and we know we are in good hands. When we remember God's great deeds in our lives, our faith is strengthened.

#4. It has been an amazing thing to watch. My grandson has a heart condition. He is one year old. The doctors want to do surgery on his little heart. We have entrusted him to God's care. Four times he was scheduled for surgery, and four times it has been canceled. We continue to say that when the time is right, it will happen. There is such genuine peace, peace that passes all understanding, when one is able to truly entrust our children to God's care.

Our precious little boy was scheduled again last week. He had been healthy for over four weeks. We thought the day had arrived. My daughter called the doctor and he asked all his routine questions. "Does he have a diaper rash?" Well, yes, he did. The doctor said that they could not perform the surgery if he had a diaper rash as it would risk taking the infection into his bloodstream. Thus, once again the surgery was canceled. Hours later, which would have been in the middle of surgery, my daughter took his temperature again; it was 102 degrees. He had an infection that would not have been caught that morning and would have been a serious risk to him in surgery and recovery. God is simply in charge of this baby! Baby Jack is in God's hands.

Handout on Faith

Faith in God means faith in Jesus Christ for Christians.

- ▶ Christians cannot separate faith in God from faith in Jesus, the Son of God who was sent to save the world.
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- ▶ A vignette: A young teenager was bombarded by a peer who gave her a bumper sticker that read: “Don’t be caught dead without Jesus.” This peer then began to preach to her about “saving faith.” She was suddenly terrified. How do I know if I have saving faith? How much faith is that? What is the “minimum daily requirement”? How much faith is needed?
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- ▶ When was the last time you thanked God for the faith you have?

A great hero of faith

- ▶ Abraham is our great hero of faith in the Bible. God told the aged, child-less Abraham that he would have a child and that his descendants would be many. In spite of Sarah's old age, he trusted God. God was faithful to his word. All generations have called Abraham their father in faith. Even today all the major religions of the world revere the faith of Abraham.
- ▶ God tested Abraham and told him to sacrifice the son that God gave him, the son that would ensure his descendants would be many. Abraham set out to do what God asked. God prevented him from following through on the Lord's command and had him instead offer a ram in Isaac's place.
- ▶ Abraham simply trusted and obeyed the word of the Lord, he understood that God was the Master of the Universe and he owed his life and allegiance to him.
- ▶ We are called to do the same.

Characteristics of faith

No discussion of faith would be complete without naming some of the very formal things that our Church teaches about the mystery of faith. What are some of the characteristics of faith?

- ▶ Faith is grace.
 - Grace is the gift of God's self to human beings.
 - Faith is a gift of God. It is a supernatural virtue (CCC: 153).
 - The Holy Spirit actively brings people to faith in God.
- ▶ Faith is a human act
 - The act of believing is a human action. God gifts us with faith, but the human will and intellect must agree to accept faith by cooperating with God's grace.
 - God takes the initiative; human beings cooperate with God's initiative. Humans can do nothing to merit the grace God extends. It is pure gift.
- ▶ Faith and understanding
 - Human reason can believe the truth about who God is and how God acts on God's own authority. There is credible evidence of God's Revelation to human beings.
 - What is that evidence? Miracles of Jesus' and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth, stability, holiness, and effectiveness/fruitfulness—all these things are credible signs that human reason can look to as a sign of God's revelation to human beings.
- ▶ Faith is certain. We can count on faith because it is based on God's Word and God's Word is true. Truth about God can seem elusive to human beings. God

reveals himself to us and what he reveals is so much more than we could ever think on our own.

- ▶ Faith seeks understanding. God creates a hunger in the human heart. When faith is awakened in a person, that hunger is intensified, and the person begins the lifelong process of discovering more about God. Faith drives us to learn more about God's revelation to us about his plan of salvation for us. The Holy Spirit continually strengthens our faith so that we in turn continually seek to learn more about God. St. Augustine said: "I believe in order to understand; I understand to better believe."
- ▶ Faith and science: God created human beings with a mind (reason). God also has gifted humans with faith. God can never contradict the truth. Thus, methodological research in all branches of knowledge (if carried out in a scientific manner and if moral laws are not broken), can never conflict with the faith; things of faith and things of the world come from the same God. A humble and persevering scientist is led by the hand of God in spite of himself for it is God who made them the scientist (CCC 159).
 - For example, "Christian faith does not require the acceptance of any particular theory of evolution, nor does it forbid it, provided the particular theory is not strictly materialistic and does not deny what is essential to the spiritual essence of the human person, namely that God created each human soul directly to share immortal life with him." (See *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, p. 58-61 for further insight into this.)
- ▶ Freedom of faith: By its very nature, faith is freely accepted, never coerced. If that is not the case, it is not faith. Jesus invited; he did not coerce, cajole, or manipulate. The kingdom of God grows through love and witness, both formal and that of a well-lived Christian life, not by coercion.
- ▶ Perseverance in faith: Faith is a free, gratuitous gift from God, but it can be lost. Diligence is required to nurture and safeguard so great a gift. Faith can easily become stagnant unless we feed it. Faith is fed by commitment to God's holy word, by prayer, especially prayer that God increase our faith, and by our acts of love, charity, and justice.
- ▶ Faith—the beginning of eternal life: Faith gives us a foretaste of heaven. We walk by faith, not by sight. We do not, in this world, see God face to face. We see him rather dimly. The Scripture uses the image of a clouded mirror. We will not see God completely until we stand before him in heaven. Suffering, injustice, and death seem to contradict the good news. It can shake our faith. We must look to those who have gone before us as witnesses of faith, to Abraham, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and those who have suffered and witnessed for their faith in God. Those who have chosen to believe in spite of great odds.
- ▶ Faith is a gift, but it is also a decision. Once the gift is given, we must decide to cooperate with that grace in order for it to grow.